

Citizens Union • Civic Commons  
League of Women Voters of New York State  
New York Civil Liberties Union  
New York Public Interest Research Group  
Open Plans • Reinvent Albany

Howard Glaser  
Director of State Operations  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

January 24, 2012

Re: Opportunity for NYS to reuse federal Freedom of Information Law software tool.

Dear Operations Director Glaser,

Our groups write today to urge you, and the New York State agencies you oversee, to take advantage of an unusual opportunity to provide better service, save tax payer dollars and increase government transparency.

We recently learned that the federal Environmental Protection Agency is on the verge of building a \$1.3 million, online software tool that will automate Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. The “FOIA Module” is set for public launch in October 2012. (An internal EPA slideshow describing the project is attached.)

The good news here is that the EPA’s project managers, and their partners at the federal Office of Government Information Services, are receptive to making their “FOIA Module” open source, and available to states and localities. However, the EPA’s time frame for finalizing the software design is very tight. Only after we contacted them did they contemplate the potential of their tool for use by state and local government. They asked us to encourage any states and cities we knew were potentially interested in this tool to contact their agencies and the White House ASAP.

Therefore, we urge you, on behalf of New York, to contact the EPA and express New York’s interest in using an open source version of the “FOIA module” for state and local government here. New York State would not have to provide money or other resources. (Below is contact information for recommended federal officials.)

New York State agencies receive upwards of 20,000 Freedom of Information Law (FOIL) disclosure requests annually. Many requests are complicated, and state

agencies vary widely in the timeliness of their responses, and the time and money it takes to process requests. Putting FOIL online, and better managing FOIL makes sense. The experts we consulted estimate government agencies save 50% to 75% in FOIL processing costs with commercially available software. However, that software can be expensive at \$1,000 per government user per year, for the first four years.

EPA's online tool is very similar to the best commercial software, and EPA estimates that it can save the federal government \$40 million annually if adopted by all federal agencies. We think NYS could save proportionally large amounts of money, while shortening response times.

Federal Contacts re: EPA FOIA Module

Lisa Jackson, EPA Administrator  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Ariel Rios Building, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N. W. Mail Code: 1101A  
Washington, DC 20460  
jackson.lisap@epa.gov

Christopher Veins, Deputy Chief Technology Officer  
White House Office of Science and Technology Policy  
725 17th Street Room 5228  
Washington, DC 20502  
chris\_a\_vein@ostp.eop.gov

We hope this opportunity proves useful to New York and it's people. It's not everyday that the federal government develops a free software tool that could save New York State and its towns, cities and counties millions of dollars while improving a heavily used public service, and increasing government transparency.

Thank you for your attention to our request.

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For more information, or to follow up with one of the signers of the letter, please contact:

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